

USDA Actions on Chronic Wasting Disease

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is the agency charged with responding to and eradicating chronic wasting disease (CWD), a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy of deer and elk.

The disease has been detected in wild deer and elk and in farmed elk herds. Currently, there is no scientific evidence that CWD poses a risk for humans or domestic animals.

Wild deer and elk have been found with the disease in Colorado and Wyoming. Wild deer with CWD have been found in Nebraska and Wisconsin. States that currently have or have had farmed elk herds with CWD are South Dakota, Nebraska, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma and Montana.

Action

In 1997, USDA began surveillance for CWD in farmed elk in cooperation with State agriculture and wildlife agencies. Elk herds that tested positive for the disease were put under State quarantine.

In September 2001, USDA began a program to eradicate CWD in affected farmed elk populations. This program involves testing, depopulating, and indemnifying owners of positive herds. USDA allocated \$2.6 million for this program.

An additional \$12.2 million of Commodity Credit Corporation funding has been transferred to APHIS for depopulation, indemnity payments, cleaning and disinfection, and information dissemination on CWD in fiscal year 2002. These funds will also be used to support surveillance and diagnostics in wild elk and deer.

In April 2002, USDA agreed to buy-out farmed elk herds in the area of Colorado where free-ranging animals have tested positive for the disease. About

15 ranches with about 1,000 animals are expected to participate in the program. Participating elk herd owners will have their animals appraised, with USDA providing indemnification at 95 percent of the appraised value, which is capped at \$3,000 per elk. Elk owners who agree to the indemnity will only be allowed to restock their land with non-cervid ruminants such as cattle, swine, and sheep.

USDA is working with States and industry to address additional indemnification issues.

Participation in USDA indemnity program will be voluntary. Producers who choose not to have an eligible herd depopulated will not be required to do so by APHIS. However, these herds will remain under State quarantine with strict movement restrictions.

USDA continues to provide diagnostic and surveillance support to States with active CWD programs while considering options for the future of the program.

State animal health officials and APHIS personnel are working to gather epidemiological information that may help to explain how the disease could spread.

CWD is typified by chronic weight loss leading to death. There is no known relationship between CWD and any other TSE of animals or people. CWD is part of a group of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, a group that includes scrapie and bovine spongiform encephalopathy. Currently, there is no live animal test or vaccine for CWD.

The mode of transmission of CWD is not known. Evidence strongly suggests that the disease may spread among deer and elk and probably from mule deer to elk and white-tailed deer. Transmission from mother to offspring may occur but does not explain many cases of CWD. Concentration of animals in captivity may facilitate transmission; however, CWD is maintained in populations of deer even at moderate to low population densities.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.